

KCC's Sneed bounces back at right time

Written by Jim Ecker

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Ariel Sneed was a junior college All-American for Kirkwood last season, but she's been slowed by a pair of knee injuries this year and has lost her spot in the starting lineup.

That's OK with Sneed. Compared to what she's been through in her young life, a few injuries and coming off the bench are child's play.

"I lost my grandma a few years ago. That's who raised me," Sneed said after starring for Kirkwood in the regional tournament Thursday night. "I know my mom and stuff, but I've just been kind of on my own.

"It's been tough," she said, "but I've been able to manage."

Sneed, a 6-foot sophomore from Harvey, Ill., looked like her old self Thursday as the seventh-ranked Eagles destroyed Iowa Central, 95-48, in the semifinals of the Region XI tournament at Johnson Hall.

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She scored 14 points and grabbed 13 rebounds in just 15 minutes of action. More importantly, she had a bounce in her step and felt good about her performance.

"I'm finally getting back to myself," she said. "Right now I know it's one game and done, so I just have a different sense of urgency. Any way I can help the team out, I'm just always there."

Sneed began her college career at the University of Chicago-Illinois, then transferred to Kirkwood for two seasons. She's signed a national letter-of-intent with Southern Mississippi and will be headed there next.

Sneed hit 7-of-11 shots from the field Thursday and snared six offensive rebounds.

"She's been better the last few games, there's no question about that," Coach Kim Muhl remarked. "And I think there's less pressure coming off the bench, too."

"She's really accepted and embraced coming off the bench right now. That's good for us, when you have that type of athleticism."

Muhl said Sneed has been living on her own, for the most part, since she was 16 years old. "She's a special kid," he remarked.

Kirkwood (27-5) will host sixth-ranked NIACC (25-5) in a showdown for the regional title Saturday at 1 p.m., with the winner advancing to the national tournament and the loser done for the year. The two national powers split their games during the regular season, each winning on the other team's home court.

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"I'm very excited," said Sneed. "Right now, it's now or never. It will be a showdown Saturday. I'm very excited about it."

Cassidy Clark matched Sneed with 14 points Thursday. Taylor Silver scored 13 and Caitlin Sudduth netted 11. Cyerra Hutchins, a freshman from Cedar Rapids Prairie, made all three of her 3-point shots and scored nine points.



Blair Silliman scored 13 points for Iowa Central (20-12). The Iowa Central players wore "Hoops 4 Huss" warmup shirts in honor of teammate Allison Huss, who died Feb. 13 after a nine-month battle with cancer.

IOWA CENTRAL (48): Wiseman 3 0-0 7, Ray 0 12-14 12, Silliman 5 0-0 13, Royster 1 0-0 3, Mericle 3 3-5 9, Anaya 1 0-1 2, Henderson 0 0-0 0, Dentlinger 0 0-0 0, Altman 0 2-4 2. Totals 13 17-24 48.

KIRKWOOD (95): Silva 5 0-0 13, Hutchins 3 0-0 9, Martensen 4 0-0 8, Clark 4 4-4 14, Sneed 7 0-0 14, Miles 1 0-0 2, Downs 2 0-0 4, Isaac 2 0-0 6, Oberman 0 0-0 0, Sudduth 5 1-1 11, Larson 2 0-0 6, Bockholt 1 2-2 4, Kallenberger 0 0-0 0, Wood 2 0-0 4. Totals 38 7-7 95.

Halftime - Kirkwood 50, Iowa Central 25. 3-point goals - Iowa Central 5 (Silliman 3, Wiseman 1,

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Royster 1), Kirkwood 12 (Silva 3, Hutchins 3,
Clark 2, Isaac 2, Larson 2).